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Have you ever set a direction for your life only to discover the path opens in another way? I've heard people use the expression, "When a door closes in life, another door opens," which is a phrase the apostle Paul might have related to as he tried going to the Roman province of Bithynia, which today is now in the area we call Turkey. The Book of Acts explains right before the passage read today that the Spirit of Jesus prevented him and Timothy from going to that area to the north, right after they had already been blocked from going to Asia.

I can just imagine Paul's frustration, "Look, we're trying to take the message of Jesus to places that we believe need to hear the Good News, but for some reason it just doesn't seem to work out. Where are we supposed to go next?" Maybe you can relate to thinking you have a great idea, only to be frustrated by circumstances that pull you in another direction.

And that evening he had a dream-like vision of someone from Macedonia calling out to him across the sea, "Come and help us." So instead of going north, Paul and Timothy traveled west, and when they arrived on the day of worship, they found a place of prayer. There a group of women had gathered, among them was Lydia, a merchant who sold purple cloth.

Today we might take the reference to purple cloth for granted, but in Lydia's day the color signified more than just a pretty color. Purple represented royalty, for only the wealthy could afford such a color that came from dyes made from certain shellfish. The production of this color originated in the nearby community of Tyre along the Mediterranean coast, in the country we now call Lebanon.¹

We don't know what Paul said to the women, but whatever it was made a huge impact on Lydia, for she and her family were baptized. Lydia then invited Paul and Timothy to stay with her family.

They remained there long enough for Paul and Timothy to get arrested and thrown in jail for helping free a slave girl, but upon their release they went back to Lydia's house before traveling to the next community.

The story of Acts moves quickly, narrating one story after another about Paul's journeys to begin new communities of faith, but I think it's remarkable that Luke, the narrator, paused alongside the river to focus on a group of women in prayer. It's almost as though he's suggesting that in the midst of all the turmoil and difficulties faced by Paul and his traveling companions, that Lydia offered them a place of respite, a time to refresh their spirits and renew their energy.

I think today we need to take the time to pause long enough to refresh our spirits and revive our energy. Do you have any women in your life who may remind you of the wisdom to pause to revive your spirit, or possibly remind you of other wise

teachings? One person reflected in a blog about several things she learned from her mother²:

- Make your bed. *(While that may seem like an odd piece of wisdom, it reminds us that creating order the first thing in the morning might help us create order the rest of the day.)*
- Yelling Accomplishes Nothing.
- You Don't Have to Like It, Just Do It. *(I think that's a good reminder that sometimes we have to do things that are not always easy.)*
- To Know What's Going on in your Children's School, Get Involved.
- Red Wine and Chicken in the Microwave = Purple Chicken.
- The Crockpot Doesn't Cook if you Don't Plug it In. *(Sometimes we need to pay attention to details.)*
- No Matter How Much You Love Your Kids, You are Going to Bump Heads With Them. *(I think that advice is true for many places in life, even the church.)*

3

- Motherhood is an Unappreciated Job.

I imagine most moms would agree with this last point, for moms do much throughout the day that children may never realize. Sometimes moms may even forget the importance of their own job, as Peggy discovered. Her husband, Tony Campolo, is a well-known speaker who spends much of his time traveling. Peggy has chosen to stay home and raise their two children.

On those rare occasions when Peggy does travel with Tony, she finds herself engaged in conversations with some of the most accomplished, impressive, influential, sophisticated people in the world.

After one such trip, Peggy told Tony that sometimes as she visits with these powerful people... she finds herself feeling intimidated and sometimes even questioning her own self-worth. Tony said to her: "Well, honey, why don't you come up with something you could say when you meet people that will let them know

that you strongly value what you do and you feel that it is dramatically, urgent and crucial and important.

Well, not long after that, Tony and Peggy Campolo were at a party... when a woman said to Peggy in a rather condescending tone, "Well, my dear, what do you do?" Tony Campolo heard his wife say:

"I am nurturing two Homo Sapiens into the dominant values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in order that they might become instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia God envisioned from the beginning of time."

And the other woman said: "O, my, I'm just a lawyer."³

On this day as we celebrate Mothers' Day, we celebrate these special women in our lives. Without them, none of us would be here. I realize that this day may be difficult for some, for some children grow up with mothers who may have been uncaring

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or neglectful. Others might miss their mothers, having recently lost them to illness or aging. But this day is also a day to celebrate all women in our lives—the women now and the women then, for without the women who have been part of the church for the past two thousand years, we might not be here worshipping today.

I invite you to recall those women of faith who have influenced you in some way, who have inspired your faith...

This morning we also dedicate a set of twelve pictures of women of the Bible⁴ who were somehow connected to Jesus—those who played a role in his ministry, and those who came generations before him.

(Read litany together on screen)

¹ <http://pffc-online.com/mag/1348-paper-history-shellfish-royalty>

² Adapted from “10 Things My Mother Taught Me,” March 17, 2011, www.mommaontherocks.com/1962/10-things-my-mother-taught-me

³ Tony Campolo adapted by James Moore, Collected Sermons, www.Sermons.com.

⁴ See artwork www.divineartbyfaith.com/women_of_the_bible.html